



# Occupational stress, quality of working life and turnover intention amongst nurses

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Turnover intention is a frequent event in almost all institutions and is associated with unfavourable consequences for employees.

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between occupational stress, quality of working life and turnover intention amongst nurses working in critical care units in Iran.

**Design:** A cross-sectional survey design was used.

**Method:** The study was conducted in the critical care units of 10 hospitals in Tabriz, Iran, between July and November 2017 using a sample of 203 nurses. Data were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire, and multiple logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the factors impacting turnover intention.

**Results:** Overall, 64% of nurses had an intention to leave their job; 82.8% of respondents reported their job to be highly stressful, and 81.2% reported their quality of working life to be low. Binary logistic regression analysis indicated that age ( $p = 0.006$ ), clinical experience ( $p = 0.005$ ), duty stressors ( $p = 0.040$ ), interpersonal relations stressors, ( $p = 0.029$ ) communication ( $p = 0.007$ ), motivation ( $p = 0.006$ ), job security ( $p = 0.040$ ) and job pride ( $p = 0.011$ ) were factors affecting turnover intention.

**Conclusion:** Occupational stress and quality of working life are associated with turnover intention amongst nurses working in critical care units. Further research is needed to determine the generalizability of these results to other settings and countries and to identify interventions that could reduce occupational stress and improve the quality of working life so that turnover intention might be reduced.

**Relevance to clinical practice:** The findings of this research suggest that lower perceived occupational stress and higher quality of working life will result in less reported turnover intention in critical care unit nurses.

**Key words:** Critical care nursing • Cross-sectional studies • Iran • Occupational stress • Staff retention • Turnover intention

## INTRODUCTION

Nurses are on the frontline of the health care system and play a significant role in the provision of health services (Kempainen *et al.*, 2013). Around the world, the shortage of qualified nurses is one of the critical challenges in the field of health care (Buchan *et al.*, 2015) and is a multifaceted phenomenon (Zhang *et al.*, 2014), which can be attributed to an absence of managerial support, low job satisfaction and poor opportunities within the profession (Chan *et al.*, 2013). The most recent systematic review (Lu *et al.*, 2012) shows that this is a global phenomenon existing in both developed and developing countries, and research has shown that the situation is particularly serious in specialty services such as critical care (Chan and Lai, 2010; Sawatzky *et al.*, 2015).

Although many factors contribute to nursing shortages, high nurse turnover is considered to be one of the major contributors (Sokhanvar *et al.*, 2016; Tourani *et al.*, 2016). Turnover is not consistently defined in the literature (Halter *et al.*, 2017), with descriptions ranging from the actual leaving of the organization to an intent to leave in the near future (Mazurenko *et al.*, 2015). It has been defined as any career move, whether that move is external, such as when nurses leave the profession or an organization entirely, or internal, when nurses move between nursing units in the same hospital (Duffield *et al.*, 2014). However, the most frequent definition of turnover in the literature is that of a process whereby nursing staff leave or transfer within the hospital environment (Kovner *et al.*, 2014).

In a comparative review of nurse turnover rates across countries conducted by Duffield *et al.* (2014), turnover rates were found to vary. In Australia, the turnover rate was 15%; in Canada, it was 20%; in the United States, it was 27%; and it was as high as 44% in New Zealand (Duffield *et al.*, 2014). In an earlier study looking at turnover rates in 10 European countries conducted by Li and Jones (2013), turnover rates were found to range from 12% to 21% (Li and Jones, 2013). In Iran, a recent study estimated an average turnover rate amongst nurses in Iranian hospitals of 32.7% (Sokhanvar *et al.*, 2018). Having insufficient numbers of appropriately qualified nurses is a considerable challenge in the delivery of quality of care (Antwi and Bowlis, 2018) and impacts hospital finances (Everhart *et al.*, 2013; Duffield *et al.*, 2014). Different risk factors, such as occupational

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